Statement of Commissioner Jeff Baran
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
April 19, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. It's great to be back with my colleagues to discuss NRC's budget.

It is an exciting time to be doing our important work. With more potential applications for advanced reactors, small modular reactors, subsequent license renewal, new fuel designs, power uprates, and risk-informed programs expected, NRC's overall workload is increasing. Our budget request is structured to allow us to take on this new work.

NRC has a key role to play in tackling climate change. It's our job to ensure the safety and security of nuclear power in the U.S. energy mix. When utilities and vendors tell us that we should expect numerous new designs and reactor applications, we need to be ready with sufficient resources and the right expertise to review them, and an efficient and effective licensing process that can handle whatever volume comes our way. That's an important NRC responsibility. So NRC is busy preparing the regulatory framework for advanced reactors and small modular reactors. At the same time, the NRC staff is reviewing applications that have already been submitted.

For the operation of existing nuclear power plants now and into the future, NRC's job is to provide strong safety and security standards and rigorous independent oversight. In this period of change, NRC needs to be open to – and ready for – new technologies that could improve safety. Whether it's digital instrumentation and control, accident tolerant fuels, sensors, advanced manufacturing techniques, or artificial intelligence, we need to establish a reliable regulatory framework for reviewing these technologies, while ensuring that they are adopted safely without introducing any unacceptable risks.

As NRC does its work, the agency is focused on its workforce. We're facing a significant hiring challenge. We have a large number of employees who are eligible for retirement. With higher employee attrition, the agency's efforts on external hiring are crucial. Significant external hiring is necessary for the agency to do the work we have in front of us now and to be ready for the work coming our way.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.